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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0820
RUEHGB/AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD PRIORITY 0403
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE
RUEHBC/REO BASRAH 0857

C O N F I D E N T I A L BASRAH 000002

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 1/25/2019
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [ASEC](#) [IZ](#) [IR](#)
SUBJECT: MAJOR GENERAL AZIZ CONFIDENT ABOUT SECURITY BUT ACKNOWLEDGES
SOME VIOLENCE POSSIBLE

REF: 2008 BAGHDAD 3475

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Basrah, Department of State.
REASON: 1.4 (b)

11. (C) Summary: Meeting with the REO Director at Iraqi Army 14th Division Headquarters, Major General Abd al-Aziz al-Dalmi expressed confidence in his security plans for election day but acknowledged the likelihood of some violence, including political assassinations and a brief period of political instability immediately after the elections. He also discussed Iranian influence in the province and Tehran's perceived attempts to undermine the local economy. End summary.

Security: Election Day and Beyond

12. (C) During his January 14 meeting with the REO, Aziz confidently promised that citizens would be able to vote safely on election day. He added that some election-related violence was to be regrettably expected, however, and suggested the possibility of political assassinations prior to January 31st. There have been some incidents of violence but none that could be directly linked to the elections. He also stressed the likelihood of violence in the months immediately following election day. Aziz explained that democracy and the peaceful transition of power were not fully understood in Iraq, and various individuals would seek to resist election outcomes. He confidently added, however, that the ISF were prepared to face the expected threat (small targeted intimidation attacks) and he projected a return to normalcy within three months.

Iran

13. (C) Aziz vented his frustration at perceived Iranian dominance of the local economy. He explained that Basra was the center stage for political power in the region and that Iran was jockeying for control. According to Aziz, Iran benefits from Iraq's poverty. He accused Tehran of trying to undermine Basra's economy by dumping cheap and subsidized goods onto the local market and suppressing Iraqi industrial development. Iraq buys many Iranian goods because they are cheap, he explained, and a wealthier Iraq would have other market options. Likewise, he added that Iraq's inadequate health care resources produce a steady flow of patients seeking medical care across the eastern border. Aziz asserted that Iranian economic policies seek to keep Iraq poor. (Note: Many Basrawis equate Iran's predatory trade practices - even though they may be legal - with an agenda to undermine Iraq. Like most Basrawis, Aziz can not - or is unwilling to - give specific examples of illegal activity connected to Iran. End Note.)

14. (C) Although Aziz expressed support for an open commerce with Iran, he reiterated concerns of Iranian interference in Iraqi affairs. He pointed out that the importation of goods provides smuggling opportunities for lethal aid, including military

hardware, ammunition, and expertise. Aziz commented that ports-of-entry, especially the port at Umm Qasr - which does not fall under his command - should be tightly controlled. According to Aziz, increased contact with Iran would mean increased influence. "There are hardliners in Tehran who want to export the Islamic Revolution, a plan which benefits from an unstable Iraq" he said, "and we have politicians who are Iranian proxies."

15. (C) Comment: Aziz is judged as very competent by Coalition military personnel. His leadership is evident from talking to his subordinates and walking around his three-square-kilometer headquarters, which noticeably lacks the litter and sectarian flags which are common in other military compounds. Reports from REO contacts confirm Aziz's positive assessment of the local security situation and anecdotal evidence suggests that public confidence in the ISF continues to be strong. For a Shi'a with rumored ties to ISCI and Badr, his hostile attitude towards Iran is notable, and shared by many Basrawis. (See reftel.) Coalition intelligence sources have recently reported plans by various groups to assassinate candidates and target voters at the polls, confirming Aziz's prediction of election-related violence. End comment.

NEGRON